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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0543
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RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM J7 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 000059

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS CENTRAL AMERICAN CARIBBEAN BASIN COLLECTIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR
(ANDRE CADIEUX) INR/IAA (PETER KNIGHT)
TREASURY FOR IA/WH (ERIN NEPHEW)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SNAR](#) [EFIN](#) [ASEC](#) [KCOR](#) [CARICOM](#)
IBRD, IDB, CDB, FBI, JM, XL
SUBJECT: JAMAICA: LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION WARNS OF
POSSIBLE LARGE-SCALE SOCIAL UNREST

REF: A. 08 KINGSTON 837 (222015Z SEP 08)(NOTAL)
[1](#)B. 08 KINGSTON 933 (311857Z OCT 08)(NOTAL)
[1](#)C. 08 KINGSTON 1040 (101902Z DEC 08)(NOTAL)
[1](#)D. 08 KINGSTON 1094 (221925Z DEC 08)(NOTAL)
[1](#)E. KINGSTON 45 (201648Z JAN 09)(NOTAL)
[1](#)F. 08 KINGSTON 176 (271832Z FEB 08)(NOTAL)

Classified By: CDA JAMES T. HEG, Reasons 1.5 (B) AND (D)

Summary and Comment

1.(C) A deteriorating economy, high unemployment and food prices, and resurgent inflation could plunge Jamaica into large-scale social unrest, according to former Prime Minister (PM) and Leader of the Opposition Portia Simpson Miller (PSM); she gave her dire warning during a farewell courtesy call by Ambassador Brenda L. Johnson, who ends a three-year posting and returns to the USA on January 20. PSM claimed that, thus far, she had acted responsibly by not fomenting unrest, but ominously warned that "if the people hit the streets, we'll be unable to stop them."

2.(C) Comment: All too aware of her populist appeal to poor Jamaicans, the charismatic PSM, who indeed has kept a low profile in recent weeks, may have calculated that public frustrations are not yet broad and deep enough to plunge the country into chaos so severe as to imperil the survival of the current government. However, with Jamaica's economic plight worsening by the day, the political pendulum now probably is swinging in her direction, and her calculus could change. End Summary and Comment.

3.(SBU) Ambassador Brenda L. Johnson, accompanied by USAID Mission Director and EmbOff, paid a farewell courtesy call January 16 on the Leader of Opposition and President of the People's National Party (PNP), the charismatic former Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM). PSM was accompanied by PNP Vice President and former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Anthony Hylton. Ambassador noted that visits by the Vice President of China, the UK's Prince Charles, and King Juan Carlos of Spain would help raise Jamaica's international profile. In response to Ambassador's inquiry, PSM expressed optimism about her

political future, but said she was sorry to see the Ambassador's departure. She expressed sincere gratitude for all that the Ambassador and the U.S. had contributed to Jamaica; during her nine months as PM, she had been impressed by the steady stream of equipment, vehicles, and training for Jamaica's Defence Force (JDF) and Constabulary Force (JCF), as well as the myriad assistance programs in justice, anti-corruption, and economic development. She recalled the critical U.S. support to the Caribbean states during the Second World War, and said that, despite ups and downs, USG assistance had remained strong ever since.

4.(SBU) Mission Director noted that revitalization of Jamaica's potentially lucrative cocoa sector would be an area of focus for USAID in coming months, and said she was pleased that Washington had been able to provide USD 5 million for repairing roads and rural schools heavily damaged by Hurricane Gustav. Ambassador noted that the recent visit of the High Speed Vessel USS SWIFT had been a great civic action success, and was glad that the vessel would return in April. Ambassador reiterated that fighting corruption was vital to both the U.S. and Jamaica. Mission Director noted that, acting on the recommendation of a visiting anti-corruption team, the National Integrity Action Forum would be launched at the University of the West Indies (UWI)'s Mona campus on January 28; she hoped that PSM would attend. PSM then recounted how, in the wake of the scandal surrounding distribution of Cuban light bulbs (reftel F), the PNP had established an internal committee to root corruption out of the party in preparation for its eventual return to power. She then said she soon would resume her "Portia's House Call" program of regular unannounced visits to communities in order to take the pulse of the people.

5.(C) PSM then opined that the current Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Government was "not speaking to the people" and "not making clear to the people" the gravity of the country's severe economic problems (reftels C,D,E); the media also were not addressing these serious issues. She claimed that, if the JLP had been in opposition while the country underwent such a crisis, by now "roads would have been blocked; if the people pour out onto the streets, no one can control them." She said Finance Minister Audley Shaw at first had downplayed the effect of the U.S. downturn on Jamaica, claiming that no rollback of prices was needed; only when the Jamaican dollar had declined sharply had Shaw reversed himself and considered ways to bring down prices. She then claimed that, when Minister of Industry and Commerce Karl Samuda had telephoned her to ask her advice, she had replied that "we'll help" by not staging or endorsing large-scale demonstrations even though "the people wanted to go to the streets...if the people hit the streets, we'll be unable to stop them. We will support the government on any initiatives which are pro-people; but we also will support the rights of the people." To this point, she claimed, the PNP had acted responsibly by not fomenting unrest.

6.(SBU) PSM observed that Jamaica faced serious trouble with declining prices for bauxite, doubts about divestment of the sugar estates, and difficulties with Air Jamaica (reftels B,C,D,E). Samuda's publicly decrying the high prices grocers were charging for basic foodstuffs "could lead to riots in supermarkets." She then recounted several cases in which she had had to supply poor people with food and medicine from her constituency office (Note: PSM represents St. Andrews Southwest, one of the poorest of Kingston's inner city areas. End note.) She claimed that malnutrition was becoming a serious problem, and that PM Golding had been making dangerous statements on the health situation by maintaining that "the people are overburdening the system." She claimed that, in reality, insulin and chemotherapy were beyond the reach of many who needed them. Hylton then pointed out that the JLP Government had erred in introducing free medical appointments and free education; years ago, former PM P.J. Patterson (PNP) had considered this, but had rejected the proposal because it inevitably would have led to increased ancillary fees) exactly what was now happening.

PSM then claimed that she had refrained from making public numerous cases of medical malpractice by the government "to avoid upheaval." Mission Director concluded by assuring PSM that USAID would continue its support for education through the Education Transformation Program of the Ministry.

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